

**Thomas Jefferson to James Sullivan, February 9, 1797,
with Copy, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve
Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul
Leicester Ford.**

TO JAMES SULLIVAN

Monticello, Feb 9, 1797.

Dear Sir, —I have many acknowledgements to make for the friendly anxiety you are pleased to express in your letter of Jan. 12, for my undertaking the office to which I have been elected. The idea that I would accept the office of President, but not that of Vice President of the U S, had not its origin with me. I never thought of questioning the free exercise of the right of my fellow citizens, to marshal those whom they call into their service according to their fitness, nor ever presumed that they were not the best judges of these. Had I indulged a wish in what manner they should dispose of me, it would precisely have coincided with what they have done. Neither the splendor, nor the power, nor the difficulties, nor the fame or defamation, as may happen, attached to the first magistracy, have any attractions for me. The helm of a free government is always arduous, & never was ours more so, than at a moment when two friendly people are like to be committed in war by the ill temper of their administrations. I am so much attached to my domestic situation, that I would not have wished to leave it at all. However, if I am to be called from it, the shortest absences & most tranquil station suit me best. I value highly, indeed, the part my fellow citizens gave me in their late vote, as an evidence of their esteem, & I am happy in the information you are so kind as to give, that many in the Eastern quarter entertain the same sentiment.

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Where a constitution, like ours, wears a mixed aspect of monarchy & republicanism, its citizens will naturally divide into two classes of sentiment, according as their tone of body or mind, their habits, connections & callings, induce them to wish to strengthen either the monarchial or the republican features of the constitution. Some will consider it as an elective monarchy, which had better be made hereditary, & therefore endeavor to lead towards that all the forms and principles of its administration. Others will view it as an energetic republic, turning in all its points on the pivot of free and frequent elections. The great body of our native citizens are unquestionably of the republican sentiment. Foreign education, & foreign connections of interest, have produced some exceptions in every part of the Union, North and South, & perhaps other circumstances in your quarter, better known to you, may have thrown into the scale of exceptions a greater number of the rich. Still there, I believe, and here, I am sure, the great mass is republican. Nor do any of the forms in which the public disposition has been pronounced in the last half dozen years, evince the contrary. All of them, when traced to their true source, have only been evidences

of the preponderent popularity of a particularly great character. That influence once withdrawn, & our countrymen left to the operation of their own unbiassed good sense, I have no doubt we shall see a pretty rapid return of general harmony, & our citizens moving in phalanx in the paths of regular liberty, order, and a sacrosanct adherence to the constitution. Thus I think it will be, if war with France can be avoided. But if that untoward event comes athwart us in our present point of deviation, nobody, I believe, can foresee into what port it will drive us.

I am always glad of an opportunity of inquiring after my most antient & respected friend mr. Samuel Adams. His principles, founded on the immovable basis of equal right & reason, have continued pure & unchanged. Permit me to place here my sincere veneration for him,

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& wishes for his health & happiness; & to assure yourself of the sentiments of esteem & respect with which I am, Dear Sir, your most obedient & most humble servant.